

A Perswasive to Prayer.

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A  
SERMON  
PREACH'D before the  
KING,

At Saint JAMES'S,

March 13. 1698.



LUKE xviii. 1.

And he spake a Parable unto them, to this end, That  
Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.

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By the most Reverend Father in God,  
JOHN, Lord Archbishop of YORK.

(Sharp)

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## LUKE xviii. 1.

*And he spake a Parable unto them, to this end, That Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*

**T**H E Parable which our Saviour spake unto them to this end was this ; *There was in a City a Judge, who feared not God nor regarded Men ; and there was a Widow in that City, and she came to him saying, Avenge me of my Adversary. And he would not for a while : But afterwards he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard Man ; Yet because this Widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.*

The Application of this Parable is easie and natural. If a Man that neither fears God, nor regards Men ; hath neither Sense of Religion nor Humanity ; may be supposed to be so far prevail'd upon by the earnest Prayer of a miserable necessitous Person, as to grant the Request made to him, and to administer Relief to the Supplicant, merely upon account of the Continuancē, and Importunity of the Petitions that are put up : Then how much more ought we to think that God, who is Infinite Goodness it self ; who is always kind and bountiful to his Creatures ; who delights to do good to them, even without their seeking and desiring it ; and who is so far from being at any Pains or Trouble for the supplying their Wants, rhat it is altogether as easie to him to do, what is requested of him, as not to do it ; I say, How much more ought we think that this God, upon our earnest and hearty Prayer to him for any thing we stand in need of, will return us a kind Answer, and grant us such Supplies as are proper for us ? But then we are to remember, that we *Pray always, and faint not* We must be diligent, and importunate, and persevering in our Devotions.

votions, otherwise we are not to expect any more favourable return of them, than the Judge in the Parable made to the Widow upon her once or twice putting up Petitions to him.

This is the Effect of the Parable. I mean not now farther to insist on it, but to stick to that point for the sake of which our Saviour framed it. *Jesus spake a Parable unto them to this end, That men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*

But what is meant by *praying always, and not fainting*, which our Lord here obliges us to? Is it to be always on our knees, and to mind no other business but Devotion? So indeed (they say) some of ancient times expounded it; but we meet with them nowhere, but in the Catalogues of the Hereticks. No certainly, *to pray always, and not faint*, doth imply a quite different thing of which I shall give an account in the following particulars.

*First*, These words import, that we should be always in a *praying Temper*, in such a Disposition of mind, that we always carry about us, and have within us the necessary Requisites of hearty Prayer; that is to say, a firm Belief of God and his Providence, a lively Sense of our own Sinfullness, and Weakness and manifold Necessities and an entire, humble, constant Dependence upon the Divine Goodness for the Supply of them. In such a Frame of Soul as this, I take, *That Spirit of Prayer and Supplication*, mentioned in the Scriptures, to consist.

*Secondly*, *To pray always*, likewise imports, that upon every solemn Occasion we should *actually* address our selves to God: seeking help from him in all the straits and difficulties we happen into; rendering our acknowledgments for every good that arrives to us in our lives; and imploring his Protection, his guidance, his Blessing upon us, in every Work of Moment that we go about.

*Thirdly*, It imports farther that we should at least twice every day, either in publick, or in private, offer up the Sacrifice of *Prayer* and *Praise* in a solemn manner.

unto God. Less than this (I think) this Phrase of *Praying always*, as likewise that other Expression of St Paul, that we should *pray without ceasing*: ( 1 Thess. v. 17. ) less than this, I say, they cannot signify; but how much more I now enquire not. It is indeed very probable, as Interpreters have noted, that these Expressions are borrowed from, and have respect to the *daily Sacrifices* among the *Jews*. Every day twice (that is to say, in the Morning, and in the Evening) by the Appointment of God, was offer'd up a Sacrifice in the Temple; to which the Devout People resorted; Which Sacrifice is in Scripture called by the Name of the *continual Sacrifice* the *daily Sacrifice*; the *neverceasing Sacrifice*; and this in Contra-distinction to the *occasional Sacrifices* which pious Persons used to bring thither. If now this be a true account of these Expressions, we cannot be said to *pray always*, to *pray without ceasing*, to *pray continually*, unless we do at least *twice* every day, in the Morning, and in the Evening offer up our solemn *Sacrifice of Prayer* to God.

But *Fourthly*, *To pray always, and not to faint*, implies great *Earnestness* and *Importunity* in our Prayers. It imports that we should not faintly Address to God, but with Affection and Fervour; with a deep Sence of our Sins, and of our Wants; and a serious and fixed Attention to what we are about; and with very ardent desires, and *hungring* and *thirsting* after that *Grace*, or that *Pardon*, or that *Blessing* that we pray for. And this is that kind of Prayer which St. James styles the *effectual fervent Prayer of a Righteous man*, which, he saith, *availeth much.* Ch. v. 16.

Lastly, *To pray always, and not to faint*, imports *Continuance* and *Perseverance* in our Prayers. That we do not pray by Fits and Starts, and then intermit our Devotion; but constantly keep up the Fervour of our Minds towards God; Not giving over our Prayers, tho' we have not a Return of them so soon as we expect; But *continuing instant in Prayer*, ( Rom. 12. 12. ) as the Apostle speaks, and *watching thereunto with all perseverance*, Eph. 6. 18.

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These are the chief things which are comprised in this Command of our Saviour, Now to recommend the Practice hereof to you, and to offer some Arguments to perswade every one thus to *pray always, and not to faint*, is that which I design in the remaining part of this Discourse.

I do not know how it comes to pass, that Men have generally so great an Aversion to this Duty of *Prayer*. They are very hardly got to it. They are glad of any Pretence in the World to be excused from it. And when they do come to perform their Devotions, (which among many is not oftner than the Laws or Customs of the Countrey oblige them to) how soon are they weary of them ! How little do they attend to the Busines they are about ! As if indeed *Prayer* was one of the greatest Burdens that God could lay upon Human Nature. Whereas in truth, if our Lusts and Passions were out of the way, and Men could be brought to give themselves the Liberty of considering things equally ; we should be convinced that there is no Work that a Man can apply himself to; no Action that he can perform, to which there are greater Invitations, greater Motives; nay, I was going to say greater *Temptations* of all sorts, than to this of *Prayer*.

Suppose one would set himself to perswade any of us to the Practice of some particular thing which he hath a Mind to recommend to us; what more effectual Method could he take for the carrying of his Point, than to lay before us the common Heads of Arguments, by which all Mankind are prevailed upon to undertake any Busines or Action ? And then to convince us, that the thing he would perswade us to, is recommendable upon all these accounts. As for instance, That it is a thing fit, and *decent*, and *reasonable* to be done. Nay, 'tis a thing we are oblig'd in *duty* to do, even so far oblig'd, that we act against out *Natures*, if we do it not. Nor have we any just Exception against it. It is the most *easie* thing in the World. It will put us to no manner of *Trouble*, or *Pains*

*Pain, or Self-Denial.* So far from that, that it is very pleasant and delightful. And not only so, but also highly creditable and honourable. And, which is the Top of all, the Benefits and Advantages we shall receive from it are extremely great in all respects. If now, I say, a Man can make all these things good of the Point he would perswade us to; sure all the World must account us out of our Wits, if we do not follow his Advice.

Yet all these things, it may be evidently made to appear, are true of *Prayer*, and that too in a higher degree than of most things in the World. What therefore can be desired in this Exercise to recommend the Practice thereof to us that it hath not? And what must be concluded of us, if, notwithstanding all this, we continue obstinate in our Neglects of it? Give me leave to speak a little to these several Particulars.

*First* of all; Doth it recommend any thing to our Practice that it is fit, and decent and reasonable to be done? Then certainly we must needs think our selves obliged to the constant Practice of this Point we are speaking of. For there is nothing that doth more become us; nor is any thing more undecent, or more unreasonable than the Neglect of it.

Is it not fit that the Sovereign Lord of us, and of the World should be acknowledged by us? That we who, do continually depend upon him, should ever and anon be looking up to him, and expressing that Dependence. Is it not fit that we, who every moment experience a thousand Instances of his kindness, partake of a thousand Mercies and Favours of his, and must perish the next Minute unless they be continued to us; Is it not highly fit and reasonable (I say) that we should take notice at least of these things to this our Benefactor?

We should think it very ill Manners to pass by our Prince, or even any of our *Betters*, without saluting them, or some way or other testifying our Respect to them, tho' they had no way particularly obliged us: But if we were beholding to them for our daily Bread; to come

come into their presence without taking notice of them, or their Bounty to us, would be intolerable. How much more intolerable therefore must it be, to pass by God Almighty day after day ; nay, to be in his presence continually, (as indeed we always are) and yet neither to pay any *Homage* or *Reverence* to him, as He is our Supreme *Lord*, nor to make any Acknowledgments, as He is our daily *Preserver* and *Benefactor*.

If we had any sense of Ingenuity, we should blush to think of passing a Day without several times lifting up our Minds, and doing our Respects to Almighty God, tho' there was no other ill in the Neglect, than only the horrible Rudeness and ill Manners that it discovers in us.

But, *Secondly* ; The constant Exercise of *Prayer* is not only recommended to us under the notion of a very decent and reasonable thing, but as an indispensable *Duty*, God Almighty hath most strictly charged it upon us, and we are Transgressors of his Laws if we do not Practise it.

Nature it self speaks sufficiently plain in this matter. And where-ever God hath to the *Law of Nature* super-added any *Revelation* of his *Will*, this Duty we are speaking of fails not to make up a considerable part of it. It would be endless to mention all that is said upon this Head by our Lord and his Apostles in the new Testament. I have told you already that they oblige us to no less than Praying *always*, Praying *without ceasing*. They use likewise abundance of other Expressions to the like purpose. They bid us, *every where to lift up holy bands*. In *every thing to make our Supplications known unto God*. *To pray in the Spirit with all Prayer and Supplication, and to watch thereunto with all perseverance*.

If it be said there is no such express command for *Prayer* in that *Revelation* which was made to the *Jews*; I answer, It is a great Mistake. The *Prophets* do over and over again injoin it as the Principal Part of the Worship of God. And those that live without *Praying*

are by those Inspired Writers rank'd among the *Atheists*.  
Psal. 53 1, 4. And as for the *Law of Moses* it self, it  
is obvious to observe, that the greatest part of it is con-  
cerning *Sacrifices*. Now *Sacrifices*, if we will understand  
them right, were nothing else but that Form or Me-  
thod of putting up *Prayers* to God, that was in those  
times used in the World. So that, in truth, so far  
was *Prayer* from being left as a Matter of Indifferency  
to the *Jews*, that most of their Religion consisted in it.

And accordingly all the Devout Men of that Chruch  
spent much of their Time in this Exercise. *David's*  
manner was to pray seven times a day. And *Daniel*  
took himself to be so much obliged to the frequent  
Practice of this Duty; that rather than break his Cu-  
stom of performing his *Solemn Devotions* three times a  
day, he would expose himself to the Den of Lyons.

Nay, *Thirdly*; So great is our obligation to frequent  
*Prayer*, that he acts against his *Nature* whosoever doth  
not practise it: for, in truth, *Prayer* is the *proper* and  
peculiar Duty of Man, as he is a *Man*.

That which constitutes the nature of *Man*, and doth  
formally difference, and distinguish him from all other  
*Animals*, is, not so much the power of *Reason*, as the  
capacity of being *Religious*. There are some Foot-steps  
of an obscure *Reason* to be observed in many Creatures  
besides *Man*; But in none, except *Him*, is there found  
any sense of a *Deity*, or Disposition towards *Religion*, or  
any thing that looks like it. That seems to be the  
Prerogative of Mankind: God endowed them, and  
them only with Spirits capable of Reflecting upon the  
Author of their Beings, and of making acknowledg-  
ments and performing Religious Worship to him.

So that to Worship God, to converse with him in  
the exercise of Devotion, to Pray, and give Thanks for  
his Benefits, may be truly said to be the proper Office of  
a *Man*, as *Man*; The natural exercise of those Faculties  
that distinguish him from *brute* Creatures. And conse-  
quently, those that live in a continual neglect of this,  
what

what must be said of them, but that they act unsuitably to their Natures, and are degenerated into a sort of *Brutishness*?

It appears then, that our *Obligations* to this Duty are many and great, and such as there is no possibility of evading. But here is our unhappiness, that those Duties which we are most strictly obliged to, are not those that we are always most inclined to practise. There may be something in the most indispensable Duties so *harsh* and *unpleasant*; so disagreeing with our other Appetites or Interests; They may be so *hard* to be performed; so *Laborious*, or so *Expensive*, or upon some other account so *ungrateful*, that we shall naturally put our selves upon the finding out Excuses for the ridding our hands of them, and easily satisfy our minds for so doing.

But now, which I desire in the *Fourth* place to be considered, There are none of these petences to be made against this Dury of *Prayer*; none of these Inconveniencies do attend it. But it is so *naturally*, so *easily* perfromed; and so *inoffensively* to all our other *Appetites* and *Interests*; That one would think, nothing but mere laziness, or stupidity, could hinder a Man from the daily Exercise of it.

It requires no great *Parts*, or *Learning*, or *Study* for the discharging it, The meanest *Capacity*, the most un-improved *Understanding*, if there be but an honest *Heart*, may perform it as well as the learnedest Man in the World.

It requires no *Labour* or *Toil*. The feeblest and most dispirited Body that can but lift up eyes to Heaven, and direct wishes thither, doth it as effectually, as the most vigorous Constitution.

It doth not go against the *grain* of any natural Inclination; nor put the body to any *pain* or *hardship*. Nor doth it contradict any appetite or affection that Nature hath implanted in us. No Humour, but either that *Sottish* or the *Malicious*; the *Brutish* or the *Devilish* is distasted by it.

It puts us to no Charge or *Expence* in the World, save that of our *Thoughts*; yet that is the noblest way of spending them: And if they be not employed thus, it is ten to one but they will be employed much worse.

It is not at all consumptive of our *Time*. For we may attend this work, when we are a doing other busines; and there is no man so full of busines, but he hath abundance of vacant spaces, which he will not know how to fill up to any good purpose, unless he hath learned this Art of laying Time.

In a word, there is no Objection against it, it is one of the Easiest, Naturaleſt, Inoffenſiveſt Duties in the World; Nay, so easie it is, that the moſt Selfiſh Man, if he was to make his own Terms with God Almighty, could not desire to obtain the Blessings he stands in need of, upon easier. If all the Mercies and Benefits we do daily and hourly need, and consequently must expect and wish for; I ſay, if they be not worth asking at the Hands of God, or returning thanks for them after he has beſtowed them; they are worth nothing.

But beſides the *unexceptionableness* and *easiness* of this Duty, it is alſo, in the Fifth place, the moſt *pleasant* and *delightful* exer- cise the World. It is true, *vitiouſ* Men will not easily think ſo, but look upon it as a dry insipid Employment; but ſo would the very *Beatiſical Vision* of God, and all the Exercises of Glo- rified Souls in Heaven appear to ſuch Men. But they are not competent Judges of Matters of this Nature, having neither Experience of them, nor Dispoſition towards them. Those on- ly can from right Notions of these spiritual Exercises, who have a good ſense and reliſh of God upon their Minds, and have uſed and accuſtomed themſelves to Devotion. Now to all ſuch I appeal, whether the *Delights*, and *Satisfaction*, and *Con- ſolation* that they receive from converſing with God, and a hearty pouring out their Souls unto him, be not inexpressible? whether they do not find more *Joy*, and *Peace*, and *Comfort* in their attendance upon God's ſervice, either *in publick*, or *pri- vate*, than ever they did from the Pleaſures and Gratifications of any of their outward ſenses.

So much as the Soul is more pure and excellent than the Body; ſo much are the Pleaſures and Gratifications of that more exquifiitely delicious than thoſe that arife from Corporeal Objec‐ ts. But of all the Pleaſures of the Soul, thoſe that it receiveth from the Communications of God to it, in the Exercise of Devotion, are incomparably the highest, and moſt affecting. We may talk of Pleaſures and Enjoyments, but no Man ever truly found them, till he became acquainted with God, and was made ſenſible of his Love, and partaker of his Spiritual Favours, and lived in an entire Friendship and Communion with him: which Friendship and Commuuiion is chiefly, if not only, both expreſſed, and maintained, by Prayer and othe Exercises of Devotion.

Add to this in the Sixth place, that Prayer is not only the moſt delightful Employment, but the moſt Creditable and Ho- nourable that our Natures are capable of. We account it, and

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very justly, a mighty Priviledge and Dignity to be known to Princes and great Men ; To have their Ear, and to enjoy the Liberty of access to them at all times : But what is this to the Honour and Dignity we receive, in having leave given us at all times, to approach into the Presence of the King of the World ?

That we, poor sinful Dust and Ashes, should be permitted to speak to so transcendent a Majesty ! Nay, should have free Liberty given us to converse with him as with a Friend ! To open all our wants, to acquaint him with all our concerns, to make known every thought of our Hearts, and every Affair of our Lives to him ! Nay, and to be assured that he will be so far from taking amiss this boldness in us, that he will favourably accept all our Applications, and make as kind returns as we our selves can wish or desire ! What greater Honour are we capable of than this ? O therefore, how far are they sunk below all the Ambition of humane Nature, that will not take all Opportunities of thus Honouring and doing Credit to themselves by the Exercise of Devotion !

But so selfish are the Spirits and Tempers of many of us, that nothing will work upon them, but the consideration of Gain, and Profit, and Advantage : Let us see therefore what of this kind we may promise to our selves from Prayer, which is my Seventh and last Considerrrtion.

And let the point be put upon this Issue. Let all that has hitherto been said for the recommending of Prayer go for nothing. If it do not appear, that it is as profitable and gainful an exercise, as it is reasonable and due ; as it is easie and pleasant, and honourable : Let no Man trouble himself about it, but throw off all thoughts of it for ever.

But in this respect also the Motives to Prayer are infinite. No Man can number the Benefits and Advantages that do accrue to us from it. I can here but only touch upon a few of the many.

Prayer is the most proper means to ennable, and refine and spiritualize our Natures. Were it not for this, it would be impossible to preserve our Souls aloft, in the midst of such a heap of earthly Rubbish with which they are overwhelmed. Our daily converse with material Objects would make us wholly sensual, and the spirit would, in a manner, be lost in the Flesh. And so it doth really fare with all those that live without Devotion towards God. However they may retain so much world-

worldly prudence, as to enable them to govern their Temporal Affairs to their Advantage; yet their Souls do perfectly grovel upon the Earth. They are utterly devoid of the Spiritual Life. They have no more sense of the Noblest and Best things, which it is the perfection of their Faculties to be employ'd about; than a blind Man hath of Colours. Into this dull state shall we all sink, if we do not take care to maintain a constant Devotion towards God; for it is by that, that the sense of Goodness is kept alive in us. It is that that raises us above this World, and preserves our Minds from the Defilements of the Earth, which by their continual mingling with material things, they would otherwise necessarily contract.

But further, Prayer doth not only tend to the bettering the Constitution of our Minds; But the Benefits and good Influences of it do extend also to all the Affairs and Actions of our Liyes. No body can tell, but he that hath tryed, how much devout and affectionate Prayer doth dispose a Man to go about his businels in the World. So far is this Exerclese from hindring our Employments, as is commonly pretended, that in truth it is a great furtherance to them.

Besides; It is the best Antidote in the World against all disappointments and vexations that we can meet with; Against every ungrateful and displeasing Accident that comes upon us in the course of our Lives. He that converseth much with God, and useth to make all his concernments known to him, is prepared to bear all things patiently, and evenly, whatsoever happen, nor can he light into any circumstances of Life, which will not be, not only supportable to him, but easie also.

Add to this in the last place, that it is Prayer that secures the Blessing of God, both upon our Persons and upon our Labours; Upon our Basket and Store; Upon our Families; Upon our Employments; And upon all that we have or do. So great is the vertue of Prayer that it turns all the Actions of our natural or civil Life, however indifferent they be, into Actions of Religion. And every thing that we have, or comes to us, is thereby made a Blessing of God, which without it perhaps might have been a Cross and an Affliction. It is Prayer by which every Thing, and every Action is sanctified to Believers.

I might name several other Benefits and Advantages to be reap'd from the Conscientious Practice of this Duty; But those that I have mention'd, may ( I think ) if they be considered,

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be sufficient to recommend it to any Man whatsoever, that hath the least kindness for himself: And therefore I will not burthen your Memories with heaping up more Motives. Only one thing I desire leave to press a little more earnestly, and particularly, than I have yet done, and that is, *The absolute Necessity of constant Prayer, in order to a Holy and Virtuous Life.*

Do any of you here present in good earnest mean to live as you should do? Do you really intend or desire to endeavour after such a pitch of Vertue and Holiness, as will be available for the saving your Souls everlastinglly? If you do not, 'tis in vain to attempt the perswading you to any thing of this Nature. If you do; then give me leave to tell you, that it is absolutely necessary that you should live in the constant Exercize of Prayer, otherwise you will never do your Busines. And on the other side, I dare assure you, if you do thus practice, you will not fail of attaining the end you aim at.

These three things I dare lay down for Truth in this Matter:

*First,* It is impossible for any Man to be good, that lives without constant Praying.

*Secondly,* Whoever is good at the present, yet if he disuse himself in this point, he will not continue good long.

And *Lastly,* Whoever makes a Conscience of Praying frequently and heartily, and continues so to do, tho' he cannot at present be said to be a good Man; yet it is impossible for him long to continue bad; he will certainly at last get the Victory over his Lusts and evil Habits. So that Prayer is both the Means without which Vertue cannot be attained; And the means that never fails of attaining it; and the Security of it when it is attained. Of these three things very briefly, and I have done.

*First,* I say, No Man can be a virtuous Man that lives without Praying. I do not deny, that some who make no great Conscience of this Duty, but live in an habitual Neglect of it, may so far retain the Notions of good and evil, and those Notions may too far influence their Actions, as that they shall not be notoriously and scandalously vicious. It may be they will not lie, nor cheat, nor oppres any one. It may be they do not live in a Course of Lewdness and Debauchery; nor will be engag'd in any Design or Action that is apparently base or dis honourable. But all this while, these Men are far from being virtuous in the Sense we now speak of. For we speak of such a Vertue as recommends us to God; such a Vertue as will be effectual

effectual for our Salvation in the other World. Now to such a *Virtue* as this, there goes nothing less than an Universal Care over all our Actions; a Serious Endeavour to frame all our Conversation suitably and conformably to the Laws of our Saviour. But how can any Man think he takes Care of this, that knowingly, and willingly, lives in a constant Contradiction to one of the principal Duties of our Saviour's Religion?

Our whole Duty is made up but of *Three Things*; That a Man live *soberly* with respect to himself, *righteously* with respect to his Neighbour, and *piously* with respect to God. Supposing now, that a Man take care of the *two former*, that is, of doing his Duty to himself and his Neighbour, (which yet I believe never any Man did, that made no Conscience of neglecting his Prayers:) But suppose a Man could satisfie himself as to these two Points of his Duty; yet if he make no Conscience of the *third*, that is, of *Piety* towards God, (as no Man can make Conscience of that, who makes it no matter of Conscience whether he says his Prayers or no) in what Sense or Notion can this Man be said to have done his Duty, or to lead a virtuous Life? Certainly in no Sense at all. For as to one *third* part of his Duty, (which is indeed as considerable at least, if not more, than either of the other) he is a notorious Transgessour. And tho' he be not *unjust*, tho' he be not *debauched*, yet wanting *Piety* towards God, he is *Impious*; And that will as certainly damn him, as either of the other. Either therefore one of these two things must be made appear, that is to say, that there may be *Virtue*, such *Virtue* as will recommend us to God without *Piety*: Or that there may be *Piety* without ever *Praying* or worshipping God, (neither of which I believe will be easily affirmed;) Or it will follow, That where there is no *Praying*, there is no *Virtue*, and consequently no *Salvation*.

But besides; We all know there is no Possibility of Living Holy and Virtuous Life, (such a Life as our Religion requires of us, and which alone will stand us in stead in the Day of Judgment) without the Grace of God, and the Affistances of his Holy Spirit. And we all know likewise that these are no way to be come by, but by earnest, and affectionate, and constant *Prayer*. How therefore is it possible, that any Man, who is not very serious and frequent in the Exercise of Devotion, should ever be able to live a Holy Life? He may indeed, by his own Study, and for his own Interest, posess himself of such good Qualities, as may make a fair Shew in the

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World, and recommend him to all about him: But the inward Principle of Goodness and Holiness he cannot have. Because he doth not practise the Means of obtaining the Grace and Spirit of God, by which alone that Principle is to be wrought in him.

But, *Secondly*. Let a Man at present be in a good State of Soul; yet it is impossible to preserve himself in that State, without the constant Exercise of Devotion. If a Man once begin to neglect his Prayers, or to grow more dull and remiss in them, or more averse to them, it is a certain Argument that he is in a declining Condition as to Virtue and Goodness. And as that Neglect, or that Dulness, or that Aversion increases, in the same Degree doth the Goodness of his Condition abate also. And when once it is come to that pass with him, that the Flame of Devotion is quite extinguished in his Heart; so that he can live, and enjoy himself without any Converse or Intercourse with God in Prayer; He may from that Period date the Loss of his Spiritual Life. He is reduced to the State of a sensual, natural Man; *Alive to the World, and to his Lusts, but perfectly dead to God,*

The plain English is, Prayer and Devotion is as necessary a means to preserve the Union between the Soul and God, in which our Spiritual Life consists, as Meat and Drink is, to preserve the Union between our Souls and Bodies, in which our natural Life consists. And we may every whit as reasonably expect to keep our Bodies alive without the constant and daily use of eating and drinking: as we can expect to keep our Souls alive to God without the constant and daily Exercise of Devotion.

This may to some appear strange Doctrine; But I do believe I may appeal to experience for the Truth of it. Nay, I dare put the question to any one, that ever took any serious Care of his Soul, and sincerely endeavoured to live virtuously, and to please God, whether he hath not found the Matter to be so as I have represented.

Have not such always found, that so long as they kept up the Fervour and Vigour of their Devotion, so long as they were constant and diligent in their Prayers, and other Holy Exercises: So long nothing could hurt them. So long they have always maintained their Post, and rather grown better than worse. And though they have sometimes been foully overtaken by some Sin that they resolved against, yet that relapse hath done them no Mischief. Their Continuance in their Prayers hath been an Antidote against the Malignity of the Sin; And they have presently weathered it out, and suffered no ill Consequence by it; But it has rather made them more watchful over themselves, and more careful of their Actions afterward.

But on the other side, have they not always found, that when once they began to abate of the Fervour of their Devotions; when once they began to pray seldomer, or with more Coldness and Indifference: They then began to live more loosely and carelessly; to be more dull and sluggish towards evrey good Work? Till perhaps by degrees the true Sense of God and Religion hath been in a great measure Worn off from their Spirits, and they in a manner have returned to a Worldly and Sensual Life. Nay, have they

they not often found, that when it has been their Misfortune to break loose from their Duty, and sink for some time into a State of Carelessness and Forgetfulness of God, and of their own Vows and Resolutions, (as it hath sometimes hap'ned to very good Men:) I say, Have they not often found that this their going backwards in Goodness was occasioned purely and solely by the Intermission of their Devotions? That there was no visible Reason, or Account to be given of this their Fall, but only that through Sluggishness or some other Cause, they have neglected to pray to God so earnestly and so frequently as they used to do; I am confident a great many can say this out of their own Experience. So that it concerns every Man that is at present in a good Disposition of Mind, and hath good Hopes towards God; It concerns him as he loves his Soul; As he would not lose all the Fruits of his past Labours and Endeavours in the Service of God; By all means possible to keep his Heart in a devout Frame; And whatever comes of it not to grow cold or languid in his Prayers; Or to omit or disuse them, either in publick or private, upon any pretence whatsoever.

But, *Thirdly* and *Lastly*, to conclude all, there is this farther to be said for the Encouragement of all sorts of Persons, to persevere in the Practice of this Duty, namely; That whoever, makes Conscience of Saying his *Prayers* frequently and heartily, and continues so to do, tho' he be not *good* at the Present, yet it is impossible for him long to continue *bad*. He will at last certainly get the Victory over all his Lusts and evil Habits, and attain to the Favour of God, and the Salvation of his own Soul. This necessarily follows from what hath been said. A Course of *Prayer* and a Course of *Sin* cannot consist together; One will necessarily destroy the other. *Praying* will either make a Man leave *Sinning*, (as a pious Man of our own used to say,) or *Sining* will make a Man leave *Praying*. But this is to be understood of *Prayer* that is put up to God with great seriousness and Heartiness, and out of a sense of Duty and Conscience. For as for those *formal* Prayers that are made out of *Custom*, or upon the account of *Education*, or for the serving some *Worldly* Ends of *Interest* or *Reputation*, or the like; God respects them no more than the impertinent Tattle of Fools.

All those of us therefore that mean and design to be *good*, though we are not so already; Let us above all things take care to mind our Prayers. Let us *pray* to God in *Private*. Let us *pray* to God with our *Families*. And let us join as oft as we can with the *Prayers* of the *Publick Assemblies*. This I am sure is the best Method we can take for the reforming our Lives, and for growing in all Virtue and Goodness. And the more we practise it, the better we shall like it. And if we persevere therein, we shall find the Comfort of it both in the *Grace* and *Affistance* we shall receive from the Holy Spirit, for the vanquishing all our Lusts and Corruptions; And in the *Blessings* we shall procure from God both to our *Selves* and our *Families*, and all our Affairs and Concernments; And *lastly*, in the Everlasting *Salvation* of our Souls in the Day of the Lord Jesus. To whom,  
&c.

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